

*Becoming a  
Fruitful Congregation*

**Study Guide**

**A Six-Week Course Based on  
“Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations”  
by Robert Schnase**

(When printing, place on back of cover or on a separate page)

## ***Study Guide and Facilitator Notes***

This study guide was prepared by the Rev. Dr. R. Franklin Gillis, Jr., Director/Ministry Consultant, *Four Seasons Ministry*. It has been designed to help local church members and leaders examine their ministries, assess current church practices, and explore ways to initiate fruitful practices that encourage church growth. Suggested activities are provided in order to promote congregational self-reflection and learning which will result in strategic plans for becoming a more fruitful congregation.

This study guide is best utilized in small groups with the participants having a copy of the text, *Five Practices of Fruitful congregations*, by Robert Schnase (available from Cokesbury.) Participants should also have a notebook for note-taking and journaling.

A facilitator familiar with the book and its intended purposes should guide the group process and activities. For maximum effectiveness in discussion and group process, groups should be limited to approximately twelve participants.

A timeframe is suggested for each two-hour session, but can be adapted by the facilitator based on number of participants, activities incorporated, and participation by group members. (Suggested timeframes total 110 minutes for each session, allowing a 10-minute break that can be incorporated into each agenda as determined by the facilitator.) Schedule flexibility should be honored in order to achieve desired outcomes. Participants should have the book and read the Introduction and Chapter One prior to the beginning of the course.

## ***Week 1: Introduction and Chapter One: Radical Hospitality***

### ***Orientation and Introductions***

(20 minutes)

- Welcome and introductions. Distribute copies of study guide.
- Review the purpose, study design, and dates for the six-week, two-hour per week study.
- Have a prayer for guidance.
- Review what the author calls the “fundamental practices,” and share responses to reading the Introduction.

### ***Defining the Practice***

(10 minutes)

- Note how “radical hospitality” is defined. (See pages 20-21.)
- As a group, address this question: *What does the author suggest to be the motivation of Christian hospitality and what does it involve?*

### ***Insights***

(15 minutes)

- In groups of 3-4, discuss and list the distinguishing marks of “radical hospitality.”
- Share key insights within the group.

### ***Self-Examination/Evaluation***

(25 minutes)

- As a group, identify your church’s current practices of hospitality.
- Discuss this question with a partner: *How can we develop a deeper sense of a “culture of hospitality” in our church?*
- Share responses within the group.

### ***Application***

(10 minutes)

- Discuss this question and share ideas: *What more can we do to practice radical hospitality individually and as a church?*

### ***Additional Questions***

(15 minutes)

- Select and address “Conversation Questions” (pages 31-32) and others of participants.

### ***Reflection and Journaling***

(10 minutes)

- What ideas from this session have meaning and application in your church?
- Write thoughts/ideas in your notebook.

### ***Preparation for Next Session and Prayer***

(5 minutes)

- In preparation for the next session, read Chapter Two: “The Practice of Passionate Worship.” Note statements of special interest and record questions that you wish to share with the group.
- Decide how and when you might want to participate in the group activity suggested on page 32.
- Have a closing prayer.

## ***Week 2 – Chapter Two: The Practice of Passionate Worship***

### ***Session Theme – Passionate Worship***

(20 minutes)

- Introduce session theme.
- Identify and record questions that participants may have as a result of their reading.
- Discuss as a group: *What are people searching for in meaningful worship?*
- Groups of 3-4 discuss the theological foundation upon which worship is based.
- Share insights with the total group

### ***Defining the Practice***

(20 minutes)

- As a group, address this question: *In what ways is passionate worship transforming?* (See page 34.)
- List the author's key comments about "passionate worship." (See pages 36-40.)
- The author suggests "passionate worship connects people with God and with one another." (Page 39.) Identify a time in worship when that has happened for you and share it with a partner.

### ***Insights***

(15 minutes)

- Address this question: *What are the main insights you gained from this chapter?*
- Share within the total group and note insights that apply to your church.

### ***Self-Examination/Evaluation***

(20 minutes)

- As a group, identify your church's current practices of "passionate worship."
- With a partner, address this question: *What difference does the practice of passionate worship make?*
- Share responses within the total group.

### ***Application***

(15 minutes)

- Discuss: *What causes "worship wars" and how can they be prevented?* (See page 45.)
- Review the elements of your church's worship service. Address: *Which ones "connect people to God and to each other?" What needs to happen in worship to enhance a sense of passion and make it more meaningful?*
- Discuss how worship can be improved to allow "passionate worship" to happen more consistently.

### ***Additional Questions***

(10 minutes)

- Select and address "Conversation Questions" (page 57) and others participants may have identified.

### ***Reflection and Journaling***

(5 minutes)

- What ideas from this session have meaning and application in your church?
- Write thoughts/ideas in your notebook.

### ***Preparation for Next Session and Prayer***

(5 minutes)

- In preparation for the next session, read Chapter Three: "The Practice of Intentional Faith Development." Note statements of special interest and record questions you wish to share with the group.
- Decide how and when you might want to participate in the group activity suggested on page 57.
- Have a closing prayer.

## ***Week 3 – Chapter Three: The Practice of Intentional Faith Development***

### ***Session Theme – Intentional Faith Development***

(10 minutes)

- Introduce session theme.
- Identify and record questions that participants have as a result of their reading.
- As a group, list the current settings for faith development that are provided in your church.

### ***Defining the Practice***

(20 minutes)

- Address this question: *What does the author say that intentional faith development involves?* (See pages 64-65)
- With a partner, identify the ways your church is assisting persons in the life-long journey of faith. Share your experiences from participating in such learning settings.
- Group sharing

### ***Insights***

(10 minutes)

- Discuss this question: *What are the main insights you gained from this chapter?*
- Share within the total group and note key insights that apply to your church.

### ***Self-Examination/Evaluation***

(20 minutes)

- Review pages 68-74 regarding the practices of churches that provide intentional faith development.
- Address these questions: *What additional settings should our church offer to more intentionally provide for faithful development and for whom? What creative new ways can be offered? What new groups need to be started, “particularly adapted to the needs of new members, visitors and people not yet attending the church?”*

### ***Application***

(30 minutes)

- The author suggests that intentional faith development “carefully considers the full life cycle of members and looks for ways the church forms faith at every stage... and looks for gaps and opportunities and unmet needs to round out their ministries.” (Page 77) Address this question: *What are the “gaps, opportunities, and unmet needs” we should address as a part of our intentional faith development ministries?*

### ***Additional Questions***

(10 minutes)

- Select and address “Conversation Questions” (page 78) and others participants may have identified.

### ***Reflection and Journaling***

(5 minutes)

- What ideas from this session have meaning and application in your church?
- Write thoughts/ideas in your notebook.

### ***Preparation for Next Session and Prayer***

(5 minutes)

- In preparation for the next session, read Chapter Four: “The Practice of Risk-Taking Mission and Service.” Note statements of special interest and record questions you wish to share with the group.
- Decide how and when you might want to participate in the group activity suggested on page 78.
- Have a closing prayer.

## ***Week 4 – Chapter Four: The Practice of Risk-Taking Mission and Service***

### ***Session Theme – Risk-Taking Mission and Service*** (10 minutes)

- Introduce session theme.
- Identify and record questions that participants have as a result of their reading.
- As a group, list words that define mission and service. (See page 85)

### ***Defining the Practice*** (15 minutes)

- As a group, identify some biblical examples that represent risking-taking mission and service to the needs of others.
- The author suggests that risk-taking mission and service involves “an outward focus that changes the world and invigorates the church.” What are some examples of such activities in your church?

### ***Insights*** (15 minutes)

- Discuss this question: *What does the author suggest are characteristics of churches that practice risk-taking mission and service?*
- Share within the total group and note key insights that apply to your church.

### ***Self-Examination/Evaluation*** (30 minutes)

- With a partner discuss the meaning of risk-taking. Address these questions: *In what ways have you been willing to take a risk in some mission or service activity as an expression of discipleship? In what ways would you be willing to take a risk for mission and service on behalf of Christ?* Be prepared to share your answers with the group.
- Group sharing

### ***Application*** (20 minutes)

- In small groups of 3-4, address this question: *How can our church cultivate the practice of risk-taking mission and service over and above the ordinary and necessary service and mission practices now being provided?* (See pages 96-99)
- Group sharing

### ***Additional Questions*** (10 minutes)

- Select and address “Conversation Questions” (page 101) and others participants may have identified.

### ***Reflection and Journaling*** (5 minutes)

- What ideas from this session have meaning and application in your church?
- Write thoughts/ideas in your notebook.

### ***Preparation for Next Session and Prayer*** (5 minutes)

- In preparation for the next session, read Chapter Five: “The Practice of Extravagant Generosity.” Note statements of special interest and record questions you wish to share with the group.
- Have a closing prayer.

## ***Week 5 – Chapter Five: The Practice of Extravagant Generosity***

### ***Session Theme – Extravagant Generosity*** (5 minutes)

- Introduce session theme.
- Identify and record questions that participants have as a result of their reading.

### ***Defining the Practice*** (20 minutes)

- Address this question: *How does the author define “extravagant generosity” and how is it expressed ?* (See page 112.)
- With a partner, discuss what the author suggests to be the positive outcome(s) of generosity.
- Group sharing

### ***Insights*** (20 minutes)

- The author describes Matt and Keri’s spiritual journey toward tithing as “growth in the grace of giving.” (See pages 103-6.) Discuss as a group and identify the main lessons they learned as they grew toward becoming tithers.
- As a group, share insights as to what motivates generosity for Christians.

### ***Self-Examination/Evaluation*** (15 minutes)

- Examine your level of financial giving, and if you *are not* a tither, consider the steps you can take to grow toward tithing. If you *are* a tither, reflect on advice you might give others who wish to become tithers.
- Volunteers share responses.

### ***Application*** (30 minutes)

- As a group, identify the signs that indicate a congregation practices “extravagant generosity” (see page 108), and consider how these practices might find expression in your church.
- In groups of 3-4, identify what can be learned from scriptures that helps us understand that “extravagant generosity” is central to both Jewish and Christian practice. (See pages 108-111.)

### ***Additional Questions*** (10 minutes)

- Select and address “Conversation Questions” (page 123) and others participants may have identified.

### ***Reflection and Journaling*** (5 minutes)

- What ideas from this session have meaning and application in your church?
- Write thoughts/ideas in your notebook.

### ***Preparation for Next Session and Prayer*** (5 minutes)

- In preparation for the next session, read Chapter Six: “Excellence and Fruitfulness.” Note statements of special interest and record questions you wish to share with the group.
- Decide how and when you might want to participate in the group activity suggested on page 123.
- Have closing prayer.

## ***Week 6 – Chapter Six: Excellence and Fruitfulness***

### ***Session Theme – Excellence and Fruitfulness*** (5 minutes)

- Introduce session theme.
- Identify and record questions that participants have as a result of their reading.

### ***Defining the Challenge*** (20 minutes)

- The author suggests that “to fulfill the ministry of Christ, congregations must change and grow and adapt in ways that are purposeful, thoughtful, and faithful.” (Page 125) In groups of 3-4, address these questions: *How does our church deal with change? What needs to change to enable more effective ministry?*
- Group sharing

### ***Insights*** (15 minutes)

- As a group identify what you consider to be your church’s core values.
- Briefly review the five practices of fruitful congregations.

### ***Self-Examination/Evaluation*** (20 minutes)

- As a group, consider how well your core values are defining and shaping your church’s life and ministry.
- In groups of 3-4, identify which of the five practices your church does well and which practices need improvement. Be prepared to share with the group.
- Group sharing

### ***Application*** (25 minutes)

- On page 136 the author writes: “Fruitfulness helps congregations align their resources and focus their efforts on reaching ‘more people, younger people, and more diverse people.’” Discuss what is required to make this happen. (See pages 136-8.)
- The challenge that produces fruitfulness includes striving for excellence in ministry. Discuss in groups of 3-4 what will be required to achieve excellence of ministry in your church. (See pages 138-140.)
- Group sharing

### ***Additional Questions*** (10 minutes)

- Select and address “Conversation Questions” (page 144) and others participants may have identified.

### ***Reflection and Journaling*** (5 minutes)

- What insights from this study have nurtured my spiritual journey?
- Write thoughts/ideas in your notebook.

### ***Next Steps and Prayer*** (10 minutes)

- Consider what you (as individuals and group) will do to enable your church to become a more healthy, vital and fruitful congregation shaped by the core values and practices discussed in this class.
- As a group, determine the next steps you will take to develop specific strategic plans toward becoming a more fruitful congregation.
- Close with a prayer of thanksgiving and commitment.